Jonestown tape said to reveal most were pressured into dying

Georgetown, Guyana (KNI)—A dramatic tape recording of part of the death ceremony at Jonestown reveals how members of the community were pressured into gulping poison by their leader, the Rev. Jim Jones, a high-placed source said yesterday.

He said the tape shows that Mr. Jones put his followers under such intense psychological pressure to die that their deaths could almost be considered "involuntary suicide."

"But the bottom line is still murder," he added, contending that they did not kill themselves voluntarily.

The tape also reveals that some argued against killing themselves, including one woman who defied Mr. Jones, insisting that she had the right to live. Her body was found along with the others.

The tape records 45 minutes of the murder-and-suicide ceremony last month in which 913 persons were wiped out in the cult's settlement in the Guyanese jungle.

Earlier Dr. C. Leslie Mootoo, the Guyanese government's top pathologist and medical examiner, said he didn't believe that "there were ever more than 200 persons who died voluntarily." He said he considered the others—more than 700 persons—to be murder victims.

The tape reveals a revival meeting atmosphere in the settlement after Mr. Jones had exhorted the group to die, telling them their position was hopeless. There were shouts of "Hallelujah" and "I am willing."

At one point Mr. Jones, who was white, told his largely black following, "This is the black way to die."

The source said comments on the tape indicate that the children in the settlement were killed first. Some say this would have sapped the parents' will to live.

Information on the tape came from a source who has listened to it repeatedly since it was discovered in a tape recorder in the Jonestown pavilion where most of the cultists' bodies were found.

The tape was found by an American official who visited the jungle settlement shortly after the bodies were found. It has been played for the American ambassador to Guyana and then returned to the United States. Copies are in the hands of Prime Minister L. F. S. Burnham of Guyana and the Guyanese police.

Evidence indicates that the Jonestown cultists died over a period ranging from 3 hours to 5½ hours. It is not known at what point the tape was made, but the source said it appears to be in the early part of the death session, because Mr. Jones is telling his followers why they must die.

"You can hear babies crying and Jones is doing most of the talking, verbally battering them," in an effort to prepare them for death, the source said.

Mr. Jones called his followers together after U.S. Representative Leo J. Ryan, (D., Calif.), and four members of his party were slain by members of the cult. Mr. Ryan had gone to Georgetown to investigate whether some members of the settlement were being held there against their will.